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THE MIDDLE-AGED CHURCHMAN

It takes grandchildren to make revolutions. What the grandfather dreamed of, the father thinks of, and the child puts into operation. It almost seems as if an idea has to have three generations back of it before it can become a social dynamic.

That is one reason why the middle-aged churchman finds himself in perplexity. He was trained to hold a self-consistent view of Christian truth and of the world in general. His father lived through a civil war and brought him up to be rather cautious about social experiments. And yet he himself could not escape the contagion of the new social and scientific emphasis of thought. If he did not entirely break from his moorings he at least found his anchor chains considerably longer.

But his own children have no such attachment to the past. They share in the father's detachment but not in his anchorage. Where he swings at anchor they set off on explorations, not always with any great care to take soundings and make observations.

The grandfathers knew how to deal with this sort of spirit. To them it was spiritual vagrancy, to be put down. But the man of the middle generation is perplexed. He is still interested enough in life to be apprehensive as to ways of living. His spiritual muscles are too bound for him to take pleasure in the pursuit of novelties. As he grows older he is liable to grow increasingly less capable of readjustment. He finds it increasingly harder to change his mind. Because he now belongs to the generation that has dared to make some progress he has a feeling that the world has made enough progress. He grows impatient of changes which the younger generation welcomes as promises of Utopia. He is like the alumnus of a college who is proud to have his college advance but is disappointed if it differs from the college of his undergraduate days.

He becomes one of those who believe in progress but are opposed to change.

But there are others among us middle-aged folks who are not content to be merely an intermediary between a reactionary grandfather and a radical grandchild. We are not anxious to run with the youth, but we are unwilling to become intellectually sedentary. Just how can we strike a middle course?

Middle age does not take readily to study. It is more interested in action. But that is really no reason why it should not study. The great danger is that our progressive churches will themselves become middle-aged, content to let respectability and sobriety tyrannize over spiritual vision and church experiment.

The descent from middle age to old age is easy, but it is fatal to others than those who make the descent. The dislike of exertion, the sense of command, the self-complacency born of progress which is ready to reap its fruits without preparing for the next year's sowing—all this is by no means necessary if only men and women who are just now in control of the churches would bear in mind that they must go on if they are not to go back. The crowded life need not be an intellectually sterile life. A life of growth should not be afraid of further growth. A mind that once studied the Bible should not shrink from studying it by a better method. An emancipated spirit that has found self-control in experience should not be afraid to move on with the younger generation as it seeks the promised land. In such companionship there will be vigor for middle age and wisdom for youth.